

Communication Matters

Volume 5, Issue 3 • December 2004

Have you tried the
**Workplace Assessment
for Individuals with
Hearing Loss?**

Let us know what you think!
Want to try it?
Send an e-mail now!
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**Partners United
for Empowerment,
Education, and
Employment of People
who are Deaf, Hard of
Hearing, Late Deafened and
Deaf-Blind**

Western Symposium on Deafness
April 20-23, 2005, San Diego, CA

The goal of the Western Symposium on Deafness is to present the latest knowledge in postsecondary education, rehabilitation, community services and technology for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened, and deaf-blind. The conference will reflect the growing recognition of the need for interagency collaboration to facilitate service provision and quality.

Registration Deadline: March 24, 2005
For more info:
wrocc.csun.edu/wsd_page.html

Workers with Hearing Loss are Us

Much of the following information was presented by Julie Eckhardt and Ann Liming at the Michigan Rehabilitation Conference, November 2004.

In an unprecedented, nationally representative sample (Boon, Schroedel, and Watson, 2004), it was discovered that 3/4 of hard of hearing adults have a hearing loss that began during their working years. Even more surprising, the onset of hearing loss was not during their later working years, but 50% had an onset of hearing loss between the ages of 19 and 44! With an estimated 8 million hard of hearing workers in the United States, at least 1 out of 10 people, hearing loss touches all of us.

The study found that of the workers with hearing loss, 80% have a slow deterioration of hearing through the working years. Two-thirds have a mild to moderate hearing loss.

You may wonder if a mild to moderate hearing loss significantly impacts workers. A Danish survey of 1,600 workers with hearing loss (2003) found that nearly 50% of workers with moderate hearing loss experience mental exhaustion on the job. Over 50% experience physical exhaustion. This compares to approximately 30% of the general population who feel exhausted from their work. The Danish researchers also found that workers with hearing loss leave the workforce at a higher rate than peers with normal hearing. In other words, struggling to hear all day is exhausting!

Due to the stress of struggling to hear, workers with hearing loss tend to withdraw from social activities after work, and may become isolated from casual conversations during work hours. Anyone who is fatigued is more prone to error. And co-workers may avoid communication due to the increased effort required on their part.

We often expect that hearing professionals, audiologists and hearing aid dispensers, provide all the necessary information and equipment to the person with hearing loss. Unfortunately, a study reported in the

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Past issues of Communication Matters are posted on the **E-Learn Deaf & Hard of Hearing Resource Center**. Information or news related to Deaf or Hard of Hearing services may be forwarded to Julie Eckhardt at jewel@chartermi.net. *Views expressed in this bulletin are not necessarily the views of Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth-Rehabilitation Services.*

Communication Matters is available on the web at: www.michigan.gov/mrs.

Workers with Hearing Loss *continued...*

May/June 2002 *Hearing Loss* found that of 942 people with hearing loss, half did not recall receiving information about telecoils from their hearing aid dispenser. Only 31% received information about other hearing assistive technology. Even more disturbing, only 20% reported that their hearing aid dispenser had discussed the specifics of hearing loss with them and a family member. Very few received any information about communication or coping strategies.

Considering this recent research, a picture is beginning to form. Average workers in their 30's, 40's and 50's are struggling on the job due to hearing loss. Many do not know that they have a hearing loss (other people mumble...). Others have been diagnosed, and may or may not purchase hearing aids (only 1/3 of people with hearing loss use personal listening devices, including hearing aids). Even those with hearing aids may know very little about what hearing loss means to their daily functioning. For example, why is it easier to hear in some situations and more difficult in others?

Bringing this home, it can be assumed that within your workplace there are several people with hearing loss. The person with hearing loss may be invisible to you. He or she may not wear hearing aids, or maybe they do and you can't see them. Or maybe you thought hearing aids solve the problem of hearing loss just like eye glasses aid vision. Hearing aids do help hearing, but create additional obstacles such as amplifying background noise along with voices.

We can all assist our co-worker with hearing loss (or ourselves) by paying attention to basic communication etiquette. To make it easy for you, a list is posted at right and meeting strategies are on the following page.

References:

Boone, S. Schroedel, J., & Watson, D., (2004). Invigorating VR Services to Hard of Hearing Consumers: A Professional Dialogue on a National Research Project." Presented at the State Coordinators for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf/Blind Conference at Gallaudet University, May 2004.

Danish Institute for Social Research, 2003. "When Hearing fails: Impact of hearing loss on work, education and personal health."

Communication Strategies

- Choose a quiet environment.
- Avoid standing in front of a light source when speaking.
- Allow the person with hearing loss to choose their seat first.
- Make sure you have the person's attention before speaking.
- Stand a normal distance from the person.
- Do not cover your mouth when you are speaking.
- Do not have anything in your mouth when speaking.
- Look directly at the person you are speaking to and maintain eye contact. Do the same when an interpreter is present.
- Ask the person what will make communication easier.
- State the topic of discussion as you begin. When you change the topic, make sure the listener is aware of the new topic.
- Speak clearly, at a normal or reduced pace.
- Use open-ended questions to check for understanding.
- Repeat the statement, then re-phrase if the person is unable to hear the words spoken.
- Use shorter, simpler sentences.
- Do not shout. A loud voice may increase distortion or give the impression you are angry, without improving comprehension.
- Use gestures, facial expression and body language to assist with communication.
- Be patient and take time to communicate. Avoid saying "never mind" or "it's not important."
- Be aware of fatigue.

Effective Meeting Guidelines

Principles that apply to all listeners (including those with normal hearing):

- The farther a person is from the sound source, the more strain will be required to hear.
- The more noise there is in or around a room, the more difficult it will be to hear clearly.
- Research has shown that adults can only attend effectively for 20 minutes at a time. This 'attending time' is significantly reduced when the listener is fatigued or straining to hear.
- Straining to hear leads to fatigue, which leads to decreased comprehension and productivity.
- All participants are responsible for following meeting guidelines that respect the speaker and allow maximum participation. The facilitator has a special role to remind and enforce effective meeting guidelines.

The following strategies will make meetings more productive for all:

- One speaker at a time.
- In ALL large groups (20+), all speakers should use the microphone at all times. This will eliminate most common hearing difficulties.
- Wait for the facilitator's acknowledgement before speaking.
- Before speaking from the audience, stand up and identify yourself. This allows those who use speechreading to support hearing to locate and see the person speaking.
- When speaking, wait for the portable microphone, or go to the microphone.
- If print materials are distributed, which have not been provided in advance, allow time for everyone to read the material before making comments. It is impossible to read and speechread at the same time.
- If a side conversation is essential, leave the room.
- Make a point to include people with hearing loss in social and incidental conversations. If a person cannot see or hear what the conversation is about, they may not assume it is appropriate to join the conversation. This can lead to isolation and withdrawal.
- Turn off all pagers and cell phones, or use silent notification.
- If an assistive listening device is used, test the device ahead of time rather than during the meeting. Don't single out a person with hearing loss to ask if they can hear well.
- If break-out sessions are required, provide alternative rooms or an option for some groups to meet in a quieter location.
- Break-out groups should continue to follow the above strategies to effectively include all participants.